Bellevue

Tallahassee Home of
Princess Catherine Murat
1854 - 1867

National Register of Historic Places

Princess Murat

Catherine Willis came to territorial Florida from Virginia with her family. Her marriage to Achille Murat united America's "first family" with French royalty. Her great-grandmother was George Washington's sister; her husband's uncle was Napoleon. During their marriage they lived in Louisiana, Belgium, and England, besides Florida.

After Achille's death in 1847, Catherine inherited and managed their Jefferson County plantation. She also became a partner in a sawmill.

In 1852, her cousin (by marriage) became Napoleon III. He invited Madame Murat to France and recognized her as a princess.
She accepted an annuity, but declined the offer of a chateau.

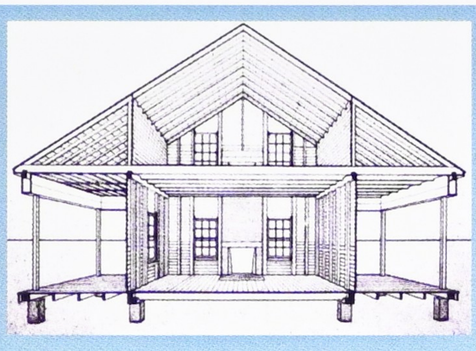
Catherine Willis Murat, about 1850

Murat returned to Florida and purchased a second property, naming it Bellevue.

Bellevue Architecture

Bellevue once stood on a 520-acre cotton plantation west of Tallahassee. It became a local landmark as the former home of Princess Murat.

Modest plantation houses were more common than grand manors. Bellevue's plan is traditional, built of local materials by skilled enslaved workers. Several of its features are common in southern architecture. Its design offered relief from summer's heat.



Architectural Rendering

- **Central hall**
- **High ceilings**

- **Above-ground elevation**
- **Deep porches**
- **Large windows and doors**

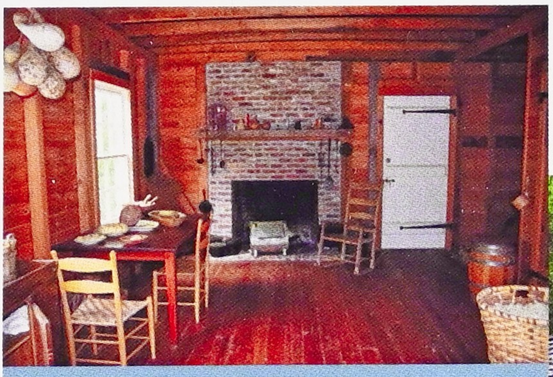
The furnishings in the exhibit date to the period of Murat ownership, 1854 to 1867. The building appears as it did at its construction, about 1840.

Bellevue's 19th century outbuildings did not survive. The kitchen and slave cabin are reproductions based on other plantations.

African Americans at Bellevue

Twenty-five enslaved people lived at Bellevue in 1860. Sixty-three lived at the Jefferson County plantation. Most were field workers; the business of the plantations was to produce cotton. A blacksmith was among the skilled slaves. Records give scattered clues about a few of the individuals at Bellevue.

Six-year-old Patsy was one of nine slaves Catherine Willis brought into her marriage. When she was older, Patsy Lee became Murat's body servant. Evidence indicates she was also an accomplished seamstress.



Bellevue Kitchen

Slave Quarters

Florida Cotton Fields, 1800s

Patsy and Ned Lee built this house for their family after freedom.

William Hughes became Achille Murat's valet at age fifteen. He served Catherine as butler, often wearing Napoleonic livery. Accompanying the Murats, Hughes saw countries where slavery had been abolished.

Jerry Hughes gave his occupation as "driver". He may have supervised the field hands at Bellevue, or driven Murat's coach.

After freedom, William purchased seventy acres of Bellevue. Before she died in 1867, Murat gave acreage to Patsy, Jerry, and to Thornton Hughes. She also left money in her will for Patsy and Jerry, with instructions for each to build a house.

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Tallahassee Museum

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